

Furthermore, extensive offerings are characterized by seven qualities: they should be (1) copious, (2) excellent, both, (3) directly perceived and (4) not directly perceived, (5) made by oneself and (6) by others, and they should (7) be offered with heartfelt delight, fervent aspiration, and with the merit being dedicated to enlightenment. The first two qualities refer to the material of the offerings themselves, for we should offer large amounts that are of excellent quality. When we offer, for instance, fruit, we could offer a variety of different fruits that are clean, fresh and delicious.

The next four qualities refer to the way the offerings are made. We should make offerings that can be directly perceived and offerings that cannot be directly perceived, with the latter referring to, for instance, offerings we visualize. Also, we should manually make offerings ourselves while helping others to make offerings along with us.

The last quality refers to the attitude we should adopt before, during, and after making the offerings. We should adopt the fervent aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, without miserliness and regret take delight in making the offerings, and dedicate whatever positive potential we created to perfect enlightenment.

9. *Offerings not contaminated by afflictions*

Offerings not contaminated by afflictions refer to offerings that are untainted by any of the afflictions. They are characterized by six qualities: offerings should be made by ourselves without making others do them for us out of laziness, contempt, or carelessness; they should be made (2) respectfully, (3) without distraction, and (4) free from afflictions such as attachment, anger, etc. Furthermore, offerings should be made (5) without expectations to receive material objects and respect from those who have faith in the Three Jewels, and (6) they should be appropriate offerings. Regarding the latter, appropriate offerings constitute material necessities of life that are pleasant and beneficial. Inappropriate offerings on the other hand are offerings that are unhealthy, unpleasant, or harmful. Lama Tsongkhapa gives some examples in his ***Lam Rim Chenmo*** of inappropriate offerings. The examples are: things that are anointed with arsenic, objects that are soaked in butter, such as soap (which therefore does not clean), poisonous, white *arka* flowers, and incense made of *gugul*, which is a strong-smelling substance used in tantric rituals to drive away evil spirits.

If we do not possess anything material to offer we can also visualize vast arrays of beautiful and pleasant objects and offer them. The ***Cloud of Jewels Sutra*** and the ***Array of Three Pledges Sutra*** further explain that those who have nothing to offer can offer objects that do not belong to anyone such as flowers, plants, trees, mountains, oceans, and so forth. Another form of making offerings is to rejoice in the act of making offerings that someone else performs. Since the Three Jewels and their representations do not actually need our offerings and since we make offerings to accumulate merit, the latter practice of rejoicing is explained to be a powerful method to accumulate vast stores of merit. In fact, in some cases the positive potential we generate when rejoicing may be greater than the positive potential of the person who actually performs the action.

10. *Offerings of practice*

Offerings of practice are the most important offerings and refer to practicing the Buddha's instructions. The best way to please the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and our spiritual teachers is to listen, contemplate and meditate on the Dharma. Since any offering that pleases the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is an appropriate offering, we should try our best to spend the entire day practicing Dharma. In fact, the Sanskrit word 'puja' literally means to *please*. And to please, that is, to practice does not mean to sit cross-legged on a cushion in a serene place; it can be done while taking a shower, doing laundry, eating, drinking, walking, talking, and so forth. The more we listen to and contemplate the Dharma, the more familiar we become with it. Becoming familiar with the Dharma in turn enables us to integrate it in all our daily activities. Since Dharma practice is mental, there is nothing that prevents us from practicing all the time.

Lama Tsongkhapa says in his ***Lam Rim Chenmo*** that Buddhist practice also entails daily recollection of the four immeasurables, the four seals, the three objects of refuge, the six perfections, the emptiness of inherent existence, the vows of ethical discipline, and so forth – all for at least as long as it takes to milk a cow (ten to fifteen minutes).

Furthermore, we should always make an effort to look inwards (especially while interacting with others) and become aware of our mental consciousness, of the various thoughts that arise in our mind, of how a particular awareness causes other types of awareness to arise, and so on. We should try to become aware of afflictions, such as anger, attachment, jealousy, etc. before they start to run wild and take over control, and then apply the appropriate antidotes.

Whenever we feel unsettled, unhappy, or restless; whenever we feel dissatisfied or depressed we should probe deeply into our mind to try to understand which affliction is responsible for the way we feel.

Whatever understanding of the Dharma we have gained we should constantly relate back to our personal experience so that we are able to move beyond a mere intellectual understanding and get a actual taste of Buddhist ideas.

If we are able to perform these ten types of offerings we are able to make complete offerings. However, while making offerings our attitude is most important, which is why Lama Tsongkapa continues his explanation with the presentation of the attitude for making offerings.

## **II. The attitude for making offerings**

The second aspect of making offerings is the attitude or what we should think while making offerings. Adopting such an attitude while making even just a small offering to any of Three Jewels will yield immeasurable results. The attitude is six-fold:

- 1) We should think that there is no greater field of good qualities than the Three Jewels
- 2) We should think that there is no greater benefactor than the Three Jewels
- 3) We should think that The Three Jewels are foremost to all [ordinary] sentient beings
- 4) We should think that the Three Jewels are as rare as an Udumvara flower
- 5) We should think that the Three Jewels are unique because in a universe of a billion world systems, there is only one [founding] Buddha
- 6) We should think that the Three Jewels are the foundation of all mundane and supramundane qualities

### *1) We should think that there is no higher field of good qualities than the Three Jewels*

The Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are the highest field of merit, for any virtuous activity of body, speech, or mind is magnified immeasurably when directed towards them.

### *2) We should think that there is no greater benefactor than the Three Jewels*

Even though there are numerous people who can greatly benefit us, such as our parents, schoolteachers, doctors, friends, and so forth, they can only free us from short-term problems and provide us with temporary happiness. Only the Three Jewels are able to provide us with temporary as well as lasting happiness. There is nothing more beneficial than the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, for they can lead us to perfecting our mind and attaining the highest possible state of Buddhahood.

### *3) We should think that The Three Jewels are foremost to sentient beings*

Since the Three Jewels are free from shortcomings and obstructions and since their only aspiration is to lead us to enlightenment they are superior to sentient beings.

### *4) We should think that the Three Jewels are as rare as an Udumvara flower*

An Udumvara flower is a special lotus flower that is said to exist only briefly at the beginning of an eon at the time when a Buddha turns the Wheel of Dharma. During the rest of that eon it does not appear again. Likewise, founding Buddhas only appear rarely and even though the Dharma they reintroduce remains for some time after their passing into Parinirvana, there are long periods of time – in fact, countless dark eons – during which the Dharma does not exist and sentient beings are immersed in great confusion and suffering. Therefore, the Buddhas, the Dharma they teach, and the Sangha they bring forth, are extremely rare.

